PHF Congress agrees to consult PSB over election process

By Mohammad Yaqoob

LAHORE: The Congress of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) on Friday reaffirmed the body's autonomous status but agreed to consult the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) over the names of a two-member election commission before finalising them for the upcoming federation elections.

The PHF plans to conduct scrutiny of clubs nationwide before holding elections from the district to the national level, beginning Dec 15 and concluding by Feb 15, 2026. The elected body will serve a four-year term (2026-30).

Addressing a press conference alongside PHF president Tariq Hussain Bugti after meetings of the Executive Committee and Congress at a local hotel, PHF secretary Rana Mujahid said the federation would adhere strictly to its constitution.

"The first stance of the Congress and the PHF president was that we will not bypass our own constitution," Mujahid said. "Neither will we act outside it, nor allow anyone else to do so."

He added that while the PHF had accepted the stance of the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination, the Senate Sub-Committee, and the PSB regarding holding elections, doing so was "not binding" on the federation.

"We accepted their suggestions in the spirit of cooperation and to create a better environment for the promotion of hockey," he said.

Mujahid said the Congress had already nominated members for the two-person election commission and that PHF president Bugti would share the names with the PSB for consultation.

"If the PSB accepts our election commission, that will be good," he said. "Otherwise, we will proceed with our own election commission. We have also invited representatives of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) Asia and the Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) to act as observers during the elections."

When asked whether consulting the PSB over the election commission would violate the Lausanne Agreement — signed between the Pakistan government and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to ensure non-interference in the affairs of the POA and its affiliated bodies — Mujahid clarified:

"Perhaps my words have caused confusion. We will only consult the PSB; the election commission has been formed by us. The PHF fully respects the Lausanne Agreement and will not compromise on its autonomy."

PHF president Bugti echoed the stance, stressing that the federation remained an independent body.

"We are following the same process under which the last PHF elections were held," Bugti said. "Yes, as observers we have invited representatives of the PSB — as is the norm — to ensure transparency."

Responding to a question about his own election, Bugti said he was first appointed on an ad hoc basis before securing a vote of confidence from the Congress.

"Our current term ends in 2026, and we are now preparing for fresh elections for the next four-year term," he added.

Bugti drew a distinction between the PHF and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), saying the hockey federation lacks basic infrastructure under its control.

"We do not have a single hockey ground under PHF management," he said. "Whenever the national team travels abroad, we have to seek funds from the prime minister or provincial governments. This is not sustainable."

He suggested the establishment of a "Pakistan Hockey Board" to manage all hockey grounds in the country and generate revenue for the sport.

Mujahid, supporting the idea, said the PHF lacks permanent financial resources.

"We recently secured sponsorship from PTCL worth Rs110 million a year, but that is insufficient," he said. "If the PCB did not receive funds through the ICC or media rights, it too would struggle."

He noted that most hockey stadiums are controlled by the PSB or provincial sports boards. "These facilities were built for hockey, but their revenues go to the boards while the PHF bears the responsibility of running the sport," he remarked.

Mujahid reaffirmed that maintaining the PHF's autonomy is in line with the IOC Charter. "Our PSB colleagues are respected, but only the PHF is recognised internationally as the body authorised to send Pakistan's teams abroad," he said. "We do not want conflict — we only want facilitation and adherence to international norms."

Meanwhile, the Congress decided to pardon members of dissident PHF groups who have sought reconciliation. "Six to seven members contacted us and expressed regret for their past actions. The Congress agreed to reinstate them after following due process," Mujahid said.

He added that 67 of the Congress's 107 members attended Friday's meeting. "Some were abroad, while others were unable to travel to Lahore," he said.

According to the schedule approved by the Congress, club registration on the PHF's online portal will take place between Dec 15 and 30. Scrutiny and district-level elections will be held from Jan 5 to 30, 2026, followed by provincial elections from Feb 2 to 10 and the PHF elections from Feb 11 to 15.

SAO PAULO: McLaren's Britain driver Lando Norris in action during the first practice session of the Formula One Sao Paulo Grand Prix at the Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace on Friday. Championship leader Norris produced a fastest late lap to top the times narrowly ahead of his team-mate and title rival Oscar Piastri. Norris clocked a best lap of one minute and 9.975 seconds to beat the Australian by just 0.023 seconds, the pair of them six-tenths clear of third-placed Nico Hulkenberg of Haas. Two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin was fourth ahead of Sauber's Gabriel Bortoleto, Mercedes' George Russell, Pierre Gasly of Alpine and Carlos Sainz of Williams. Isack Hadjar was ninth for Racing Bulls and Kimi Antonelli 10th in the second Mercedes.—Reuters

Pakistan look to prove a point in ODI series decider against SA

FAISALABAD: After a scrappy win in the opening One-day International against South Africa, Pakistan's frailties with both bat and ball resurfaced in the second match. As the three-match series stands level at 1-1, the hosts will have a point to prove when they take the field for the decisive fixture at the Iqbal Stadium on Saturday.

Under newly-appointed ODI captain Shaheen Shah Afridi, Pakistan stumbled to a two-wicket victory in the series opener, surviving a late collapse to cross the finish line. Two days later, they were undone by South Africa's left-arm pacer Nandre Burger and veteran opener Quinton de Kock, who combined to seal an emphatic win for the visitors.

For Shaheen and his men, the stakes are high as Faisalabad's Iqbal Stadium — hosting its first international series in 17 years — prepares for another packed crowd. A complete all-round performance will be required if Pakistan are to clinch their first home ODI series win since 2022, when they defeated the same opponents away from home.

With Pakistan fielding a full-strength squad against a largely second-string South African side, pride as much as points will be on the line. For that to materialise, Shaheen and batting mainstay Babar Azam — the side's two senior-most players — will need to produce match-defining performances.

Babar, who had shown signs of regaining form with a half-century in the T20I decider last week, has managed scores of only seven and 11 in the two ODIs. Shaheen, meanwhile, has struggled to make an impact with the ball, taking just one wicket in the series so far, and has found himself under scrutiny in his first assignment as captain.

Pakistan's fielding has also been a concern, with dropped catches and misfields proving costly in the previous match. The lapses meant that half-centuries from Saim Ayub, Salman Ali Agha and Mohammad Nawaz — which had rescued Pakistan from a shaky 22-3 to a respectable 269-9 — went in vain.

"I think Saim and Agha did really well, and their partnership helped us," Shaheen said after the second ODI. "After losing three wickets early, we thought 270 was a good score, but dropped catches cost us. We will come back strongly."

Babar, too, will be aware of the expectations of Faisalabad's cricket-hungry crowd, many of whom have turned up in large numbers across the first two games. A strong innings from the former captain could well anchor Pakistan's batting effort, provided the middle order builds on recent signs of stability.

Pakistan's management, led by coach Mike Hesson, faces a few tactical decisions. The team used eight bowling options in the last match, reflecting Hesson's all-rounder-centric approach that has drawn some criticism. While the strategy adds depth to the batting order, it has occasionally left the side short of a cutting edge with the ball.

Leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, who took 3-53 in the opening match, could return to the XI after being left out for the second ODI. There is also a chance of an appearance for left-arm wrist spinner Faisal Akram, whose variation could test South Africa's middle order.

The visitors, meanwhile, have been buoyed by de Kock's return to form. The wicketkeeper-batter's unbeaten 123 in the second ODI — his 22nd career century — underlined his experience and timing. Burger's four-wicket burst with the new ball exposed Pakistan's vulnerability against pace, while stand-in captain Matthew Breetzke has shown steady form at the top.

South Africa's attack, featuring Burger, Nqabayomzi Peter and Lungi Ngidi, will once again test Pakistan's consistency, while spinners Bjorn Fortuin and George Linde may come into play if the surface slows down under lights.

Squads:

PAKISTAN: Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Faisal Akram, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Haseebullah, Hasan Nawaz, Hussain Talat, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan (wicket-keeper), Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Salman Ali Agha

SOUTH AFRICA: Matthew Breetzke (captain), Corbin Bosch, Nandre Burger, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Donovan Ferreira, Bjorn Fortuin, George Linde, Kwena Maphaka, Lungi Ngidi, Nqaba Peter, Lhuandre Pretorius, Sinethemba Qeshile.—Agencies

BCB probes sexual harassment claims

DHAKA: The Bangladesh Cricket Board has opened an inquiry after former women's captain Jahanara Alam accused former and serving officials of sexual harassment.

The 32-year-old pacer, in an interview on a YouTube channel, accused officials including then selector and manager Manjurul Islam of sexual harassment during the 2022 Women's World Cup in South Africa.

Manjurul, who is currently in China, rejected the allegations as "baseless".

Describing an incident during the 2022 World Cup, Jahanara alleged that Manjurul "made inappropriate physical contact", claiming he "often hugged or pressed female players to his chest" under the pretext of encouragement.

"You can ask other girls in the team", Manjurul said. "This is all false."

Manjurul, 46, a former left-arm seamer, played 12 Tests and 34 ODIs for Bangladesh between 1999 and 2004, before serving in various coaching and managerial roles.

Jahanara took 48 wickets in ODIs, and 60 in T20s, across 135 white-ball matches for her country.

She also named other BCB officials, and said that she had previously written to the board, but that no action had been taken.

The BCB said a committee would submit its findings within 15 working days.

It reaffirmed its commitment to a "safe, respectful, and professional environment", it said in a statement late Thursday.

"We have to investigate this, since it's a serious matter," BCB vice-president Shakhawat Hossain said.—AFP

Sri Lanka name squads for white-ball tour of Pakistan

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka announced two 16-member squads on Friday to tour Pakistan for a three-match One-day International series and a T20I tri-nation series involving Zimbabwe.

Sri Lanka Cricket said in a statement that Charith Asalanka would lead both squads, which share several of the same players.

All three ODIs will be played in Rawalpindi on Nov 11, 13 and 15 before the venue hosts the first two matches the tri-series, which will shift to Lahore for the remaining matches.

The final is set for Nov. 29.

The tri-series was originally set to be feature Afghanistan instead of Zimbabwe, before the former pulled out of the tournament following cross-border skirmishes between Pakistan and its western neighbour.

Sri Lanka squads:

ODI: Charith Asalanka (captain), Pathum Nissanka, Lahiru Udara, Kamil Mishara, Kusal Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Kamindu Mendis, Janith Liyanage, Pavan Rathnayake, Wanindu Hasaranaga, Maheesh Theekshana, Jeffrey Vandersay, Dushmantha Chameera, Asitha Fernando, Pramod Madushan, Eshan Malinga.

T20I: Charith Asalanka (captain), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Mendis, Kusal Perera, Kamil Mishara, Dasun Shanaka, Kamindu Mendis, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Janith Liyanage, Wanindu Hasaranaga, Maheesh Theekshana, Dushan Hemantha, Dushmantha Chameera, Nuwan Thushara, Asitha Fernando, Eshan Malinga.—AFP

Dube credits team backing for bowling improvement

GOLD COAST: India all-rounder Shivam Dube said the backing he received from team management had helped him develop into a utility bowler, with the 32-year-old repaying their faith in him by helping the tourists to victory in Thursday's T20 against Australia.

Dube earned his place in the squad primarily because of his six-hitting prowess but it was his medium pace which did the damage on the Gold Coast where he claimed the prized wickets of rival captain Mitchell Marsh and dangerman Tim David.

India triumphed by 48 runs at Carrara stadium to pull 2-1 ahead in the five-match series heading into the fifth and final match in Brisbane on Saturday.

Dube said that since India's victorious Asia Cup campaign bowling coach Morne Morkel and skipper Suryakumar Yadav had handed him a "good plan", while head coach Gautam Gambhir had offered the management's backing to execute it.

"It (plan) was more about how to bowl on what type of track," he explained. "Gauti Bhai (Gambhir) also told me. 'Don't worry about runs, bowl without any worry. We are backing you.'"

India made a competitive 167-8, and their plan when Australia began their chase was to make the home batters hit towards the bigger side boundaries.

"I think the boundaries were 80m-plus. We knew it wont be easy to hit however well you may connect," said Dube. "Definitely its a T20 game and any of the batters can come and smack it. But on this ground, where the side boundaries are big, we had planned it very nicely and we had confidence that we can stop them."—Reuters

Australia's Weatherald keen to partner Khawaja in Perth

MELBOURNE: Australia's Jake Weatherald says he is excited about the possibility of opening the batting with Usman Khawaja in the first Ashes Test against England later this month, even if he was not his senior team-mate's first choice.

While the uncapped Weatherald is not assured of his place at the top of the order for the opening match in Perth, the significance of being selected in Australia's 15-man squad was not lost on the 31-year-old.

"It is a pinch-yourself moment," he said in Hobart on Friday. "As a kid in Australia, you grow up wanting to play professional sport; representing Australia in cricket is the highest honour, and something that I've aspired to my whole career."

Khawaja had singled out Matt Renshaw as his preferred option to open alongside him, but when his Queensland team-mate did not make the squad he subsequently backed Weatherald.

"He didn't have me in four days ago," quipped Weatherald, whose rich form in domestic cricket prompted his Ashes section. "You get the backing of someone like that who's played so much first-class cricket, so much Test cricket.

"He's made so many hundreds for Australia and is such a respected cricketer within our community.

"I'd be really excited to partner up with him at some point."

Speaking to Fox Cricket on Thursday, Khawaja had praised Weatherald's consistency.

"I've played a lot of cricket against him ... he's a terrific player. Conditions last year were pretty hard at Shield cricket, and he was a standout," said the 38-year-old.

Australia are hoping all-rounder Cameron Green can bowl his full quota, which would allow them to slot him in at number six and clear the decks for Weatherald and Khawaja to open with Marnus Labuschagne at his preferred number three position.

HARRIS DISMISSES BROAD'S ASSESSMENT

Meanwhile, former Test paceman Ryan Harris dismissed England counterpart Stuart Broad's scathing assessment of Australia's quality ahead of the Ashes and tipped England to leave the country without the coveted urn once again.

Broad rated Pat Cummins's side as "probably the worst Australian team" since that which lost 3-1 in 2010/11, while judging Ben Stokes's outfit the best since that triumphant England campaign.

Harris, who played in three Tests of that series, said the former England quick was well wide of the mark on both counts.

"No way. He has got to be joking if he thinks this is the worst Australian side since those Ashes," the 46-year-old told Reuters. "Obviously, he's in the media, so he's drumming up the hype.

"We had some pretty good players but they were just better. England were unreal, relentless with the bat and the ball."

While praising the quality of the current England squad's bowling, Harris questioned how anyone could compare them with the formidable England outfit captained by Andrew Strauss.

"Their batting is unproven. Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett on our wickets. Joe Root's been a number of times and hasn't scored a hundred, has he?" said Harris, who took 57 Ashes wickets at an average of 20.63 across three series. "So there's a lot of unproven stuff there. Broad is obviously drumming up interest but you can't just sit there and say they're the best team since whenever, because they haven't been out here and played — and the ones that have, haven't (won)."

Australia have won the last two home series 4-0 and whitewashed England 5-0 in 2013/14.

Now a Sheffield Shield-winning coach of South Australia, Harris expected the hosts to retain the urn though he rated England a good chance to end their 15-year wait for a Test match win in the country.

England's hopes of doing better than that will rest largely on the all-round performance of talismanic captain Stokes, who took 17 wickets against India in the recent home series.

Harris tipped Stokes for a big Ashes despite his relatively modest batting and bowling record in Australia next to his lofty career standards.

Harris said Australia must target Stokes, just as the 2013/14 side did to opposing skipper Alastair Cook, England's batting hero from the 2010/11 triumph.

"We've got to make sure we put Stokes under pressure," said Harris. "One thing that we've done successfully in the past is put the England captain under pressure. We did that with Alastair Cook, not allowing him to dictate how he wants to play and get them off to good start.

"It will be similar with Stokes if we can contain him with the ball."

The opening match of the five-test series begins on November 21 in Perth.—Reuters

Liverpool and City renew rivalry as they try to narrow Arsenal gap

LONDON: Manchester City host Liverpool this weekend in the latest chapter of a compelling rivalry that has dominated the Premier League for nearly a decade — but this time both clubs are playing catch-up.

Table-toppers Arsenal will hope their two main rivals cancel each other out at the Etihad, but a win for either City or Liverpool would be a psychological boost.

The Gunners, meanwhile, face former captain Granit Xhaka when they travel to fourth-placed Sunderland, while Manchester United seek revenge for their defeat in the Europa League final by Tottenham Hotspur.

Arne Slot has steadied the ship at Anfield, reverting to a tried-and-trusted defence after a run of four Premier League defeats that threatened to derail Liverpool's season.

It is too soon to say if the defending champions have turned a corner but consecutive wins and clean sheets against Aston Villa, in the Premier League, and Real Madrid, in the Champions League, are steps in the right in the right direction.

"Our main focus is on consistency at the moment, as you know we've lost a few games, much more than we usually do ... We were consistent but we were consistently losing. That wasn't the idea," a laughing Slot told reporters ahead of Sunday's clash.

"It wasn't a surprise for me how the last two games went. It was helpful that the other team did what we expected them to do," he added.

"In eight out of the 10 games we've played this season, we've faced a different playing style. But there is still a lot of work to do to get more performances like that. It is helpful."

City are second in the standings with 19 points while Liverpool are a point behind in third. Both teams are well adrift of Arsenal [25 points] but Slot said Pep Guardiola's City were his immediate focus rather than the league table.

"These are the games everyone looks forward to and if you're part of it, you look forward to it as well. It's always worth watching because so many great individuals are playing that game," Slot said.

Slot's defence for the past two matches has been Conor Bradley, Ibrahim Konate, Virgil van Dijk and Andy Robertson — all of whom were at the club last season.

On Sunday the Reds will face a challenge of a different magnitude when they come up against Erling Haaland, who has already scored an astounding 27 goals in 17 matches for club and country this season.

The Norway forward has scored twice in each of his past four home league games. Two more on Sunday would take him to a century of Premier League goals in record time.

On Saturday, Tottenham and United meet on Saturday for the first time since they faced off in May's Europa League final between two misfiring teams.

Spurs, who finished 17th in the Premier League last season, jettisoned manage Ange Postecoglou despite winning that match 1-0 to end their 17-year trophy drought.

United, who finished 15th, decided to stick with Ruben Amorim.

Both clubs can argue they made the right decision despite an inconsistent start to the new campaign, given they are level on 17 points after 10 games and well in the fight for Champions League football.

Spurs started brightly under new boss Thomas Frank but their home form has been poor, with just one win in five league games.

Tottenham were booed off by their own fans after an anaemic performance in last week's 1-0 defeat by London rivals Chelsea.

But they beat Copenhagen 4-0 in the Champions League on Tuesday, with Frank saying it was a "step forward in terms of how we want to play".

United, whose three-match winning run was ended by Nottingham Forest last week, will be desperate to beat Spurs after four defeats against them last season.

Meanwhile, Xhaka will return to the Emirates Stadium as fourth-placed Sunderland look to breach Arsenal's rock-solid defence.

Mikel Arteta's Gunners have won their past eight games in all competitions without conceding a goal, a joint-record for an English top-flight club.

They are six points clear at the summit of the Premier League and joint top of the league phase table in the Champions League.

Xhaka has been a revelation since joining newly-promoted Sunderland from Bayer Leverkusen. The Switzerland midfielder scored his first goal for the Black Cats against Everton on Monday and also has three assists.

Xhaka, 33, said he was looking forward to facing a club where he spent "seven amazing years".

"We know the quality that Arsenal has," he told Sky Sports. "It will be an emotional game for myself." Arsenal will hope he does not enjoy the match too much.

Arteta on Friday credited Xhaka for making him a better coach.

"He made me a better coach. He helped us to develop and improve a lot as a team and a club," Arteta added. "I will be eternally grateful because I have great memories with him."

Fixtures: Saturday (1500 GMT unless stated): Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United (1230), Everton v Fulham, West Ham United v Burnley, Sunderland v Arsenal (1730), Chelsea v Wolverhampton Wanderers (2000).

Sunday (1400 GMT unless stated): Aston Villa v Bournemouth, Brentford v Newcastle United, Crystal Palace v Brighton and Hove Albion, Nottingham Forest v Leeds United, Manchester City v Liverpool (1630).—Agencies